



"Enthusiasm": From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye

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Enthusiasm:

From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye

... Listen!

*The locomotives groan,
and a draft blows through crannies and floor;
"Give us coal from the Don!"*

*Metal workers
and mechanics for the depot!
At each river's outlet, steamers
with an aching hole in their side,
howl through the docks:
"Give us oil from Baku!"*

*While we dawdle and quarrel
in search of fundamental answers,
all things yell:
"give us new forms!"*

*There are no fools today
to crowd, open-mouthed, round a "maestro"
and await his pronouncement
Comrades,
give us a new form of art—
an art
that will pull the republic out of the mud.*

—Vladimir Mayakovsky
From: "Order No. 2 To The Army
of Arts" (1921)²

The year 1930 would not seem to have been a very pleasant one for Dziga Vertov. On the political front it was a year that saw a hardening of the Stalinist regime and with it the aesthetic of Socialist Realism. (Vertov was radically opposed to this aesthetic.) On the technical front, it was a year that found Soviet cinema disoriented by the advent of sound and its film-makers conflicted as to its proper use. (Vertov was in the vanguard of this conflict.) On the personal front, it was a year that saw Vertov's dismissal from VUFKU, the Pan-Ukrainian Committee of Cinema and Photography. (Vertov, of course, had been charged with

the sin of formalism.) But 1930 was also the year in which Vertov made *Enthusiasm*, a film that it may be useful to see as the object upon which these other lines converge.

Earlier in 1930 Vertov had written a plan for the film, giving it the dual titles of *Symphony of the Donbas* or *Enthusiasm*. This plan described mainly the visual shots to be included in the film. But it is more interesting to note that during 1929³ he had written another treatment for the film, one that was conceived almost totally in terms of sound. *Enthusiasm* was to be Vertov's (and, one of Russia's) first sound films, and his fascination with the new medium is apparent in his writing:

A clock ticks. Quietly at first. Gradually louder. Still louder. Unbearably loud (almost like the blows of a hammer). Gradually softer, to a neutral, clearly audible level. As if the beating of a heart, only considerably louder.⁴

The fact that he could conceive of and describe in advance an independent sound track for the film is, in itself, extraordinary; but less so, when one considers the concerns of Vertov's youth. His academic background seems to have been quite broad. He studied music at a conservatory in Bialystok, and then attended medical school. While there, he pursued an interest that had been his since childhood—that of creative writing. After completing several novels, Vertov explains in his *Notebooks*:

... all was transformed into a fascination with a montage of stenographic notes and sound recording—in particular a fascination with the possibilities of documenting sounds in writing, in attempts to depict in words and letters the sound of a waterfall, the noise of a sawmill, in musical-thematic creations of word montage ...⁵

As historian Georges Sadoul makes clear in his work on Vertov, in such pursuits the latter was no doubt influenced by the Italian Futurist art movement, then concerned with the use of sound in general and industrial noise in particular. In 1911,

Bailla Pratella had written a "Manifesto to Futurist Musicians" in which he had called for the expression of "the musical soul of the masses, of great industrial timber yards, of trains, of transatlantic ships, of . . . the glorification of electricity."⁶ In 1912, Marinetti had said that writers should "give the word" to objects and machines and introduce noise into literature. In 1913, painter Luigi Russolo had written:

Let us travel together across a great modern capital, ears more attentive than eyes, and we will vary the pleasure of our sensibility in distinguishing the gurgling of water, of air, of gas in the metal pipes . . .⁷

As Sadoul points out,⁸ the phrase "ears more attentive than eyes" seems certainly to have been a key one for Vertov. For in 1916 he set up a Laboratory of Hearing in which to conduct such Futurist-influenced sound experiments. Thus we find, strangely, that the film-maker most known for his concern with the *eye* was really, at first, most concerned with the *ear*. And one can see *Enthusiasm*, which Vertov himself referred to as "a symphony of noises," as an almost postponed event—one that he was somehow ready for in the twenties, but which was not, technologically speaking, ready for him.

But let us return to Vertov's sound scenario of 1929. Examining this along with the 1930 treatment of the visuals, we realize that we have what amounts to separate sound track and visual track conceptions for the film. One might read into this fact the notion that the sound track is primary. (After all, its plan did come first and seems to have been written with more care and detail.) But this may be unfair. What can certainly be inferred, however, is that Vertov intended to treat the sound and visual elements in the film as separate and *equal*. This general attitude toward sound had, of course, been called for by Eisenstein (and Pudovkin and Alexandrov) in 1928. Eisenstein feared that most of the first sound films would be those in which sound recording would "proceed on a naturalistic level, exactly corresponding with the movement on the screen . . . providing a certain *illusion* of talking people, of audible objects, etc."⁹ This, he felt, would destroy montage and thus he called for sound to be treated as "a new montage element (as a factor divorced from the visual image.)" As a means of accom-

plishing the divorce of sound from picture, he proposed "its distinct non-synchronization with the visual images."

In 1930, Vertov made his own statement on the sound film, partly in reaction to that of Eisenstein:

Declarations about the need to keep visual moments from coinciding with audible moments, just like declarations about the need to have only sound films or only talkies aren't worth a bean. In sound film, as in silent film, we distinguish only two kinds of films: documentary (with real conversations and sounds) and play-films (with artificially prepared conversations and sounds). Neither documentaries nor play films are obligated to have visible moments coincide [or not coincide] with audible moments. Sound shots and silent shots are edited alike; they can coincide [or not coincide] in montage or they can mix with each other in various combinations . . .¹⁰

Clearly, Vertov, like Eisenstein, is concerned with the integrity of the sound track, the creation of sound as well as visual montage. But his conception of this is perhaps more radical. He rejects Eisenstein's notion of achieving aural independence through a mere nonsynchronization of visual and auditory material, and, as we shall see in examining *Enthusiasm*, achieves it through concepts of editing and synchronization of a more subtle nature. But, more importantly, Vertov is also, like Eisenstein, wary of the sound film's potential for naturalistic illusion. However, he proceeds to interpret and subvert that illusionism in a fundamentally different manner.

Enthusiasm is, first of all, a documentary, which, on one level, is about the efforts of the Don Basin region to accomplish certain industrial-agricultural tasks of the First Five Year Plan. These tasks consist mainly of the mining of coal, the production of steel, and the harvesting of wheat (in that order). It is an ode to the cooperative enthusiasm of Soviet workers and a lesson concerning the interrelatedness of their various tasks in achieving State Socialism. What occurs in the Don Basin is a synecdoche for what is occurring in Russia at large. But *Enthusiasm* is obviously more than this. And perhaps an examination of the first section of the film (the only section which is, significantly, *not* about the Five Year Plan) will help to make the film's deeper meaning clear. For what is important about the first part of *Enthusiasm* is that, examined microcosmically, it can reveal to us the essential structures of the film

Vertov's
ENTHUSIASM.
Together with
such other
significant Sov-
iet films of the
twenties as
A SIXTH OF THE
WORLD, SALT FOR
SVANETIA, and
AELITA, it will
soon be placed
in circulation
by the Museum
of Modern Art.



in its entirety. It can reveal Vertov's theory of sound and how it relates to his conception of film in general.

What one is most struck by in the first section of *Enthusiasm* is the sense of incredible tension that exists between the sound and visuals. The sound physically pushes itself away from the screen; and the two seem related in the manner of magnets with like poles aligned—physically separate, but interacting through lines of force. Because of this dynamism, we are continually made aware of the sound track and visual track as separate entities. This, of course, arises from Vertov's highly experimental use of sound in the film. He studiously avoids the conventions already developed for the sound film in Britain and the United States (like synchronous dialogue, naturalistically related sound and image, and background "musak"), and instead employs the abstract and dissociative technique of audiovisual collage.

But before confronting the precise nature of that collage, it is useful to answer two questions: (1) *Why* does Vertov create this radical audiovisual disjunction; and (2) *How* does he accomplish it? One might conjecture, for example, that it is merely a virtuoso attempt to edit sound shots as

flexibly as visual shots, and ascribe its disorienting use of sound montage to Vertov's earlier experience with Futurist experimentation. But this would be looking at the aesthetics of the film without regard to its political content.

The crucial thing to remember is that *Enthusiasm* is a documentary, a film whose sound as well as visuals are documentary in nature. And if one examines briefly Vertov's theory of documentary (best known in the form of Kino- or Cinema-Eye) some puzzling aspects of the film fall into place. For Vertov's conception of Cinema-Eye applies exactly to his notion of Radio-Eye; what holds for his theory of cinematic visuals applies to his theory of cinematic sound as well.

To summarize, Vertov's first assumption politically is that the masses must be educated and conscious of the social, economic and political workings of the Soviet state:

We need conscious men, not an unconscious mass. Submissive to any passing suggestion.¹¹

His second assumption is that the average human being, with the normal human perceptual apparatus and limitations of time and space, is severely handicapped in his ability to be cognizant of these factors. The world is:

. . . A whirlpool of contacts, blows, embraces, games, accidents, athletics, dances, taxes, spectacles, robberies, and incoming and outgoing papers, against a background of seething human labor.

How is the ordinary unarmed eye to make sense of this visual chaos.¹²

His third assumption is that machines (for example, the camera and the sound recorder) have the capability that humans do not, to perceive life and, furthermore, to organize its chaos into a meaningful whole. This is due largely to their more perfect recording mechanisms and their powers of mobility:

Slicing into the seeming chaos of life Kino-Eye attempts to find answers in life itself. To find the resultant force among the millions of phenomena related to any given subject.¹³

His use of the term "resultant force" gives us another clue, which is that Vertov regards the process of film-making as a *scientific* endeavor. His task is "to combine science with cinematic depiction in the struggle to reveal truth . . . to decipher reality."¹⁴ This is important because just as the scientist's depiction of the world has nothing to do with the average man's *perception* of the world (e.g., I see the sun "rise" and "set" and do not see the turning of the earth on its axis), so Vertov's depiction of the world in cinematic terms, though documentary, will be far from isomorphic with our perception of it. His model is life as it exists independent of the human perceptor, not life as experienced by Man.

And finally, as Annette Michelson has stated in her seminal work on *The Man With the Movie Camera*,¹⁵ Vertov in his radical concern with mass consciousness wants the viewer of his documentary films to be continually aware that he is watching a film. He wants to break the mesmeric spell of the cinema to insure its didactic powers. If the masses watch a play-film with even approved socialist content, they may be swayed by the powers of the medium, and its actors, and not persuaded, intellectually, by the truth of its arguments.¹⁶ For Vertov the people must have knowledge and not belief; and to insure this, one must subvert the power of the cinematic illusion:

For the Kinok demystification is equally important on the screen and in life.¹⁷

Thus, the use of sound in *Enthusiasm* is not just a virtuoso attempt at sound collage, art for art's

sake. It is a radical attempt to break the naturalistic illusion of the sound medium.

Long live the class consciousness of healthy men with eyes and ears to see and hear with.¹⁸

This is borne out by a close reading of the first section of the film in terms of both technique and content. For what is the subject of the first section of *Enthusiasm* if not the process of demystification itself? On the level of content, the film begins with images of Russia in the grips of hypnosis by Tsarism and religion. We are flooded with images that reconstruct the period: the Tsarist monogram, church bells, statues of Christ, genuflecting worshippers, crucifixes, etc. Counterpointed with these images are sounds of liturgical choirs singing, people intoning the mass, sacred music, cuckoos, and ticking clocks. Most sound-image relations fall under the category of asynchronicity, with the exception of the church bells which are simultaneously seen and heard.

Intercut with these images of religious and monarchal worship are images of staggering drunks. It is not difficult to interpret Vertov's statement; religion is, after all, the opiate of the people.

In the next sequence, Vertov centers on the process of demystification. The act of coming out of the political-religious trance is accomplished, symbolically, through the destruction of a church and its subsequent conversion into a public social club. In this very spectacular sequence, we see multiple prismatic images of the church spire appear on the screen and jump around. A split-screen image of the crucifix is seen with each cross bending toward the other as though falling. Other images of crucifixes vibrate and go round in a circle. The impact of the visuals is underscored and accentuated by the sound track, which consists of drum rolls that are carefully matched to the rhythm of the images.¹⁹ Finally, we see the castrated church spire fall to the ground, accompanied by the large crash on the sound track. This is repeated several times in a dramatic climax to the sequence.

Ultimately, in a series of reverse shots accompanied by band music, we see socialist flags fly onto the front of the defrocked church and the inverse religious conversion is accomplished. Reli-

ENTHUSIASM

gion is seen and heard for what it is and eliminated. "The perfumed veil of kisses, murders, doves and prestidigitation" is lifted.²⁰ The people are finally conscious. The red star flies up and magically the church is transformed; and magic is, perhaps, the point. For only the Cinema Eye/Ear can see and hear in this extraordinary way—can straddle time and space, uniting visually and aurally events that to the average person are unrelated (. . . "freed from time and space, I coordinate any and all points of the universe wherever I may plot them."²¹) And it is also the point in that Vertov continually makes sound and image so "tricky" that one is aware of the trick. He is like a magician who performs tricks only to reveal to us how they are done; only to instruct us against falling for tricks in the first place.²²

The content of the first section of the film reveals something else as well. The very first visual shot is an ambiguous image of a young woman, who puts on headphones and sits in front of some kind of switchboard: (likely, the "radio-telegraph" mentioned in Vertov's sound scenario). It is an image that will continue to reappear and punctuate the section as a leit-motif. The woman is usually seen in the posture of listening; hence, the preponderance of close-up shots of her ears and earphones. It soon becomes clear that this woman serves the function of standing for the film *listener*. At one point, in fact, as she puts on her earphones the sound track carries the voice of a man shouting: "Attention. Attention. Leningrad speaking . . . RV3 . . . at a wavelength of 1,000 meters. We now broadcast the march, "The Final Sunday," from the film, *Symphony of the Donbas*."²³ This is immediately followed by the image of a conductor leading an orchestra which is presumably playing the very music that she is listening to.

The woman serves essentially two functions. Within the context of the film she seems to play the role of sound "monitor," a member of the film production crew who audits the sound recording process.²⁴ On another level, however, she seems to stand outside the film, and in this capacity is identified with the film audience itself.

Clearly, the iconography of this preface to *Enthusiasm* reveals Vertov's commitment to cinematic reflexivity; to sabotaging all filmic illusions, in this case, those pertaining to the medium of



Dziga Vertov

sound. Just as in *Man with the Movie Camera* we are made aware of the Cinema-Eye, so in *Enthusiasm* (or, "Woman with the Earphones") we are forced to be conscious of the Cinema-Ear.

The last time the radio-telegraph woman appears is during the final shots of this section, when demystification of religion is accomplished. Significantly, she is seen without earphones, sculpting a bust of Lenin.

There is also another aurally reflexive element in this introductory section: the orchestra conductor. Early on in the film we hear orchestral music accompanying certain images. But it is not until

many shots *later* that Vertov shows us this very music in the process of being conducted. It seems both an instance of audiovisual time reversal and an example of Vertov's desire to reveal the film-making process. It may also be an apologia for what is probably the only studio-recorded sound shot within the film.

Vertov had very rigid notions of the need for pure documentary footage. As an earlier quote reveals, for him the important distinction in the sound film was not between asynchronization and synchronization but between real and artificial conversations and sounds. One might ask, however, *why* the distinction is so important; why the bell sound used in the film could not have been recorded on a sound stage or created in a sound effects machine. But one need only examine Vertov's statement about the apple:

If a fake apple and a real apple are filmed so that one cannot be distinguished from another on the screen, this is not ability, but incompetence—inability to photograph.²⁵

And so it is with sound. But it also important to remember that Vertov considered himself a scientist and was concerned with using sound as *evidence*.²⁶ We can learn, for example, about the human body by seeing a plastic model of the skeletal system. But then we are only taking on faith that it corresponds to what is actually beneath the skin. However, if we dissect a cadaver and observe a real skeletal system we have evidence. And it is the same with film.

But how, specifically, on the level of sound technique, does Vertov help to break the aural cinematic illusion, the illusion that we are "there" listening, and remind us we are listening to a film? On the most general level he causes the viewer to feel profoundly disoriented in the sound space of the film. His means of achieving this are numerous and can be found in an examination of the first section of the film:

1. *Disembodied Sound*: During the shots of the radio-telegraph woman we intermittently hear on the sound track a clock ticking and a mechanical cuckoo. These sounds remain, however, disembodied and are never identified with anything depicted on the screen.

2. *Sound Superimposition (from various sound spaces)*: At points in the first section of the film the clock ticking is heard "over" the church bells. Clearly the clock and bells are spatially unrelated.

3. *Sound/Visual Time Reversal*: The example of the orchestra conductor has already been cited.

4. *Abrupt Sound Breaks*: During the title sequence the Kom-somol band music abruptly changes to cuckoo calls; and later a woodwind march is abruptly cut off by the loud tolling of a bell. The most extreme example of this occurs during a march sequence when the music is actually broken off three times for moments of silence, as though someone had lifted a needle off a record and placed it down again.

5. *Abrupt Tonal Contrasts*: This technique is similar to the one above. However instead of involving sound "breaks" it involves stark tonal contrasts (e.g., the cut from the light sound of a woodwind march to the heavy tolling of a church bell).

6. *Sound Edited to Create an Effect of Inappropriate Physical Connection to the Image*: The best example of this occurs before the destruction of the church. We see on the screen a succession of static images: a church spire, a madonna, a statue of Christ, a Tsarist monogram. Each one is accompanied on the sound track by the tolling of a bell. The feeling that arises from this particular coupling of sound and image is that the very same impact of the bell clapper that causes it to toll, also "causes" the image to appear on the screen. It is as though the bell could toll not only sounds but pictures.

7. *Synthetic Sound Collage*: At points in the film, the sound mixing becomes so synthetic that one is reminded of its artificiality, of its status as pure film sound. An example occurs during the section in which religion is exposed. Accompanying the images of icons and genuflecting worshippers are sounds of bleating horns, organ music, church bells, etc.

8. *Inappropriate Sounds*: The spire "crash," when listened to closely, seems to be the sound of an explosion.

9. *Mismatchings of Sound/Visual Distance*: Often the visuals are in medium shot or long shot while the sound is in close-up. For instance when the spire falls we are much farther away visually than we are aurally.

10. *Mismatchings of Sound/Visual Location*: At points it is clear that while a visual has been shot in exteriors, the sound to which it is linked has been shot in interiors. This pertains to the shot in which drunks seen out of doors are accompanied by liturgical music clearly recorded indoors.

11. *Metaphorical Use of Sound*: The cuckoo is used in an openly semantic way. Its superimposition over church bells "says" that religion is insane, or, perhaps, "for the birds." The ticking clock (which is not realistically cued) becomes, metaphorically, the mechanical pulse of the nation, its "heartbeat", as Vertov puts it in the sound scenario.

12. *Sound Distortion*: Vertov openly employs sound distortion in certain sections of church bell tolling. This, of course, has semantic implications as well, in alluding to the warped teachings of the church. As we hear the distorted chiming, however, we see on the screen the normal movement of the bell. Thus a further sound/image disjunction is established.

13. *Technological Reflexivity*: In the first section we have two shots of loudspeakers hung in the corners of the rooms. We also

have the commentator on the sound track mention the film, *The Symphony of the Donbas*. Furthermore, we have the presence of the radio-telegraph woman.

14. *Association of One Sound With Various Images*: Over the course of the film a single sound will be synchronized to a variety of images. This breaks the illusion that any particular image is the source of that sound; or that the sound and image synchronized were recorded at the same time or in the same space. An example of this technique is the sound of a strange, high-pitched whistle which at one point accompanies shots of the mines, and at another, shots of the steel foundry.

15. *Simple Asynchronism of Sound and Image*: Examples of this are the church choir sounds versus images of drunks; Kom-somol march versus the image of a train; the tolling bell versus the image of Christ's statue.

Accompanying these techniques of aural reflexivity Vertov, of course, employs deconstructive visual strategies to reinforce our consciousness of film *qua* film. Perhaps his most general method involves a total liberation from a "realistic" mode of spatial presentation. The spaces of consecutive shots are almost never contiguous; and it is impossible ever to reconstruct the geography of the settings we are in. Vertov's framing of shots contributes to this disorientation. Almost all the images in this section are shot at an angle. The surfaces upon which people, buildings, and machines stand are framed so as to be almost never parallel to the horizontal axis of the screen. Since things are not positioned this way in our real life experience we are constantly reminded of the mediation of the Camera-Eye. A second related technique Vertov employs is to misframe a shot and then "correct" it. In one shot, for example, the image of a church appears askew. The camera then rotates until the image straightens out and is perpendicular to the bottom of the screen.

Superimpositions, prism shots, split-screen effects, reverse shots and decelerations are used quite lavishly. The last shot of the section contains an acceleration that makes clear Vertov's concern. We have on the screen a static image—that of the church which has been converted into a social club. Instead of shooting it at normal speed, however, Vertov has shot it so that it appears in accelerated motion. The church of course remains "still"; but clouds rush past it in fantastic pixilation. On a semantic level, Vertov is most likely aiming at a sense of the socialist state "rushing into the future." But on a formal level, by tak-

ing what is essentially a static shot and giving it synthetic acceleration, Vertov underscores the fact that the church exists within the space of a film. The introductory section also contains such visually reflexive elements as: a shot of the movie theatre; an image of a drunk who visibly "shoos" away the cameraman; and exaggerated camera movements that remind us of its mechanical presence (its "drunken" movement in following an inebriated man; its swinging movement in paralleling the ringing of a bell).

But to return to the issue of sound, in the industrial and agricultural sections of the film which follow, we find an extension of Vertov's technique of audio-visual editing. In our discussion of the opening sequence of the film we had noted how Vertov's use of a distorted church bell and cuckoo sounds, in addition to being aurally reflexive, had thematic relevance to his critique of Tsarist Russia. In the agricultural and industrial sections, Vertov elaborates on this *semantic* use of sound. In these sections, however, the major thematic emphasis has shifted from a critique of the Russia of the past, to a celebration of the Soviet state of the present. Specifically, Vertov wishes to delineate the *interrelatedness* of the various Donbas tasks which conjoin to fulfill the directives of the first Five Year Plan. Thus Vertov will employ a single sound (like that of the Internationale being sung) to unify such diverse images as a workers' meeting, a coal miner, and a train leaving for the Donbas. Furthermore, Vertov cuts fluidly, without transition, between sounds of one kind of Donbas activity and another: from the sound of a train bringing coal workers, to that of farmers singing in the field. This technique asserts the fundamental unity and connection between the various labor tasks. A similar semantic function can be ascribed to many of the asynchronous sound/image relations in the film. For example, the disembodied shouts of "Hurrah" which accompany the images of the coal miners are clearly meant to stand for the massive support of other Donbas workers. Thus throughout *Enthusiasm* the very techniques that Vertov utilizes to break the sound illusion serve simultaneously to advance the film's political and thematic content.

In addition to entailing the elaboration of these semantic strategies, the agricultural and industrial

sections do, of course, involve an extension of Vertov's reflexive aural techniques as well:

1. *Sound Acceleration*: At one point in the film the Komsmol music becomes accelerated in a manner possible only through varying the speed of the recorded sound track.

2. *Sound Reversal*: In the agricultural section involving a peasant dance, a man plays an accordion. The second time a musical theme is heard it has a strange quality and *seems* to have been mechanically reversed.

3. *Images of Soundmen*: In several shots of the film a soundman can literally be seen on the screen, recording. One such shot occurs in the agricultural section as the women are stacking hay. Clearly, this reminds the viewer of the sound recording process and parallels the presence of the cinematographer in *Man with a Movie Camera*.

But what is *most* astonishing when one considers the complexity of audiovisual editing in *Enthusiasm* are the production circumstances under which it was made. For as Vertov himself suggested, we must not merely judge *Enthusiasm* in an absolute or general sense "(outside of time and space)" but rather appreciate it "in relation to the given state of the development of the sound cinema."²⁷

The Soviets were, of course, late in obtaining sound technology because it was not a crucial aspect of the first Five Year Plan.²⁸ Also, it was legislated that all materials for sound equipment should be made in Russia's own workshops and foundries, rather than imported from capitalist countries. Thus it was not until 1928-1929 that Shorin and Tager's sound systems were demonstrated.

The development of portable and open-air equipment presented additional problems; and it was not until August 1929 that Tager and Obolensky tested an open-air system in the streets of Moscow.²⁹ Since Vertov's concern in *Enthusiasm* was with documentary, rather than studio, sound, such equipment was mandatory for on-location shooting, and he had to await its development. In an article written by Vertov in 1931, after the film's completion, he recounts the difficult process involved in producing the apparatus for his project:

The urgent manufacture of a mobile sound-recording installation was made the main question of the day. Comrades Timartsev, Tchibissoff, Kharitonov and Moltchanov, collaborators in the laboratory of Professor Shorin, worked day and night to assemble the installation. During the course of

April we proceeded with the first attempts at shooting. Next we filmed May Day, then the port of Leningrad and finally, after the apparatus had undergone some modifications, we left for Kharkov to film the Eleventh Congress of the Ukrainian Party. After filming the Congress, the apparatus was again modified and we left for the Donbas.³⁰

Thus, *Enthusiasm* was a pioneer work in the development of on-location sound technique; (Vertov called it an "icebreaker . . . of sound-film documentaries"³¹). As such it provided concrete evidence for the possibility of documentary sound and countered a then-prevailing theory, advanced by sound engineer Ippolit Sokolov, that all film sound required studio post-synchronization.³² *Enthusiasm*, however, proved otherwise and realized Vertov's desire to "move over from the velvet coffin of the soundless studio and plunge into the terrible thunder and iron clanging of the Donbas."³³

In addition to pioneering the use of mobile recording equipment, Vertov and his crew experimented with other aspects of audiovisual registration. According to Vertov's "Report to the First Conference of the Workers of Sound Film"³⁴ his collaborators tested three modes of recording. First they took the picture and sound at different times on different negatives; second, they took the picture and sound synchronously on different negatives; third, they took both picture and sound synchronously on the same negative. From these tests they concluded that the final method provided the highest quality visual and aural material.

But the optimal procedure for recording sound and image led to difficulties and challenges in the editing process. For Vertov was severely hampered by the lack of sophisticated sound-editing machinery. As he explains it:

We had at our disposal neither a sound-editing table nor the least apparatus for organizing sound and visual cine-material . . . nevertheless we did not follow the line of least resistance, we did not exploit the favorable fact that we were provided in the Donbas with a mobile installation and that consequently the majority of sounds were recorded on the same strip as the image. We were not content to simply have the sound and image coincide and we followed the line which, in our situation, was that of maximum resistance, that of the complex interactions of sound and image.³⁵

Curiously, the few instances in which sound and image do simply coincide in *Enthusiasm* (e.g., the workers' speeches) are experienced by the audience as a kind of unexpected shock. Which

reminds us that what Vertov has created in *Enthusiasm* is a work in which sound almost never seems to issue from the screen. Most sound films create for us a certain illusion: we see on the screen the image of a man starting a car, and hear, simultaneously, on the sound track, a noise that is appropriate to it in terms of content and aural quality. The two merge, overlap perfectly and seem united. This unity in a sense places the spectator perceptually within the space of the film; he experiences the scene as though he were "there." By breaking this unity (by having sound and image to some degree "repel" each other) Vertov leaves him forever within the space of the theater. It seems probable that this disjunction was what Vertov hoped to insure in his operation of the sound system during the London screening of the film:

When Vertov attended the presentation of his first sound film, *Enthusiasm*, to the Film Society of London on November 15, 1931, he insisted on controlling the sound projection. During the rehearsal he kept it at normal level, but at the performance, flanked on either side by the sound manager of the Tivoli Theatre and an officer of the Society, he raised the volume at climaxes to an ear-splitting level. Begged to desist he refused and finished the performance fighting for possession of the instrument of control . . .³⁶

Vertov intended for us not to be referred to the space of the film, but rather to the space of the outside world. This statement may seem confusing and paradoxical in that *Enthusiasm* in no way seems to replicate our impression of reality. In its radical disruption of the cinematic illusion, in its insistence on documentary evidence, it seems to us less real, less documentary than even most fiction films.

But this is not paradoxical if one recalls that for Vertov the notion of documentary in no way implied a document of the human experience of the world, one confined by an imperfect biological perceptual apparatus and bodily limitations of time and space. For Vertov, his films were a document of a world unmediated by normal human perception. "My road," he said, "is to a fresh perception of the world."³⁷

The purpose of this liberation from human experience (and thus the rationale for a complexity of technique) was to afford the viewer a conceptual knowledge unavailable to him in his normal

perceptual stance, to allow him to "decipher in a new way the world unknown to him."³⁸

Vertov said: "Truth is our object. All our devices, modes and genres are means. The ways are various but the end must be one—truth."³⁹ But his critics misunderstood. Ignoring his intent, they chastised his means. His artistic virtuosity was gratuitous, his technique, formalistic. Vertov was forced to leave VUFKU. But all this was not happening in a vacuum. It was occurring against the backdrop of certain political and artistic developments. A new aesthetic policy was taking over. According to Dickinson and de la Roche:

The new policy, known as socialist realism, aimed at a *simple* naturalism and adventures in individual virtuosity were considered unnecessary *if the subject could explain itself in plain statement.* (Italics mine)⁴⁰

But for Vertov the subject could never explain itself in plain statement. And a simple naturalism could mystify, entice, and entertain the viewer, but could never provide him with evidence for knowledge about the real world. Finally, for Vertov the paradox lay not within the structure of his films, but within the fact that although truth itself be simple, "it is far from simple to show the truth."⁴¹

NOTES

1. Vertov seems alternately to have used the term "Radio-Ear" and "Radio-Eye" in relation to his conception of the sound film. In a statement of 1925, for example, he uses "Radio-Ear" to describe, specifically, the *sound track* of a film and talks of establishing "a visual class bond (Kino-Eye) and an auditory bond (Radio-Ear) between the proletariat of all nations . . ." (*Articles. Journaux. Projets.* trans. by Sylvanie Mossé and Andrée Robel. (Paris: *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 1972), p. 74. (My translation.) In a statement of 1929 (*Ibid.*, p. 133) Vertov seems to use the term "Radio-Eye" to mean *sound film* (i.e., sound plus image). Thus he talks of the Kinoks Radioks having moved from Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye "that is to say, to the audible, radio-diffused Kino-Eye." It is because the term "Radio-Eye" seems to be more inclusive and appears in the later writings that it is used in this paper.

2. Vladimir Mayakovsky, "Order No. 2 to the Army of Arts" (Trans. by Max Hayward and George Reavey) in Patricia Blake (ed.), *The Bedbug and Selected Poetry* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960), p. 147-148.

3. The dates for the sound and visual scenarios for *Enthusiasm* come from the German edition of Vertov's writings: *Dsiga Wertow: Aufsätze, Tagebücher, Skizzen*. Edited by Hermann Herlinghaus with the collaboration of Rolf Liebmann. (Berlin:

Institut für Filmwissenschaft und der Deutschen Hochschule für Filmkunst, 1967), p. 314ff.

4. P. 282 of Vertov's collected works in Russian. From the forthcoming Vertov volume edited by Annette Michelson and translated by Kevin O'Brien.
5. Dziga Vertov, "The Writings of Dziga Vertov," trans. by S. Brody, in P. Adams Sitney (ed.), *Film Culture Reader* (New York: Praeger, 1970), pp. 361-362.
6. Georges Sadoul, "Dziga Vertov," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, (May/June 1970), p. 19. (My translation.) The material in this article is also contained in Sadoul's book on Vertov: *Dziga Vertov*. (Paris: Editions Champs Libre, 1971).
7. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, trans. by Jay Leyda, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1949), p. 258. (Italics mine.) The next two quotes by Eisenstein are taken from the same text, pp. 258-259.
10. Dziga Vertov, "The Vertov Papers," trans. by Marco Carynnyk, *Film Comment*, (Spring 1972) p. 50. (The material within the brackets is my own additional translation of material taken from "Responses à des Questions" in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, (May/June 1970), p. 16.)
11. Dziga Vertov quoted in Annette Michelson, "The Man with the Movie Camera: From Magician to Epistemologist," *Artforum* (March 1972), p. 66.
12. Dziga Vertov, "The Vertov Papers," op. cit., p. 46.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
14. Dziga Vertov, "The Writings of Dziga Vertov," op. cit., p. 362.
15. This concept of subverting the cinematic illusion is a central point in Michelson's article.
16. It would be interesting here to contrast the didactic means of a play-film (like Eisenstein's *The Old and the New*) with those of *Enthusiasm*.
17. Dziga Vertov, "From the Notebooks of Dziga Vertov," trans. by Marco Carynnyk, *Artforum* (March 1972), p. 75.
18. Dziga Vertov quoted in Michelson, op. cit., p. 66.
19. My description of these sequences is taken from a print of *Enthusiasm* that has been restored by Peter Kubelka and is shown in repertory at Anthology Film Archives in New York City. The Museum of Modern Art has the Gosfilmofond version which formed the starting point for Kubelka's restoration.
20. Dziga Vertov, quoted in Michelson, op. cit., p. 66.
21. Dziga Vertov, "The Writings of Dziga Vertov," op. cit., p. 359.
22. Michelson's notion of Vertov's movement "from magician to epistemologist" is central here.
23. From the translation of the film's titles by Kevin O'Brien for Anthology Film Archives.
24. There may be some support for seeing the radio-telegraph woman as standing for a sound monitor in that, according to Jay Leyda in *Kino* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960, p. 282) part of *Enthusiasm* was recorded on a non-portable sound system that was hooked up to a Radio-Centre.
25. Dziga Vertov, "The Writings of Dziga Vertov," op. cit., pp. 368-369.
26. See Annette Michelson's use of the term, op. cit., p. 64.
27. Dziga Vertov, *Articles, Journaux, Projets*, op. cit., pp. 155-156. (My translation.)
28. Jay Leyda, op. cit., Chapter XIII.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
30. Dziga Vertov, *Articles Journaux, Projets*, op. cit., p. 152 (My translation.)
31. *Ibid.*, p. 153. (My translation from the French).
32. *Ibid.*, p. 156. (My translation from the French).
33. Dziga Vertov, "Report to the 1st Conference of the Workers of Sound Film," (delivered in the summer of 1931). According to Vlada Petric, the manuscript of this Report is kept in the Herbert Marshall Archive, Center for Soviet and East European Studies, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. I wish to thank Vlada Petric for bringing this Report to my attention and for his translations of passages from it.
34. *Ibid.* (My description of Vertov's methodology is based on Petric's paraphrase of portions of the Report).
35. Dziga Vertov, *Articles, Journaux, Projets*, op. cit., pp. 154-155. (My translation.)
36. Jay Leyda, op. cit., p. 282.
37. Dziga Vertov, "The Writings of Dziga Vertov," op. cit., p. 359.
38. *Ibid.*
39. Dziga Vertov, "From the Notebooks of Dziga Vertov," op. cit., p. 81.
40. Thorold Dickinson and Catherine de la Roche, *Soviet Cinema* (London: Falcon Press, 1948), p. 27.
41. Dziga Vertov, "The Writings of Dziga Vertov," op. cit., p. 365.

VERTOV IN ENGLISH

The University of California Press is preparing a Vertov volume, edited with an introduction by Annette Michelson, text translated by Kevin O'Brien. Publication is scheduled for late 1978.

CORRECTION: In our last issue, some of the stills in the Herzog article were *not*, as credited, by author Gideon Bachmann.